

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

Volume 35 Issue 4 Summer 2015



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## HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Human Development Magazine is a quarterly publication for people involved in the work of fostering the growth of others. This includes persons involved in religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, pastoral care and education interested in the development of the whole person.

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### HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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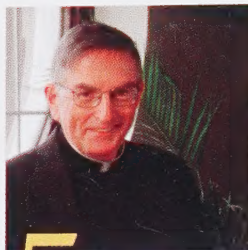
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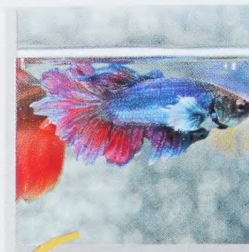
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# THE MEANING OF POWER

Summer 2015

Dear Friends:

On behalf of our evolving and growing Editorial Board, I am pleased to present this late summer edition of Human Development Magazine which showcases a thematic approach and several other features intended to complement the articles and to elicit your response. Aware that our readership includes many consecrated religious and clergy, we are endeavoring to focus the articles on timely themes relating to pastoral ministry, personal spiritual growth and formation. We remain committed to the founding vision of Father James Gill, SJ – to foster personal integration so that we in turn can build up the wholeness/holiness of the Church. Working in conjunction with Guest House in Lake Orion, Michigan we are especially sensitive to our common need for healing through self-awareness and support. Like each of us, Human Development Magazine will continue to evolve thanks to your suggestions and input.

At the editorial table, as we were planning a theme for this inaugural issue of our new format, we noticed the many “power struggles” of our times – tensions this past spring in Paris, France, in Ferguson Missouri and in Baltimore, persecution of Christians by ISIS and militant extremists around the world, not to mention our own struggles with parish staff and parishioners, in our religious congregations and indeed within our own hearts. As Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us, wherever there is inequity in the world, there will be a struggle for justice and that struggle inevitably brings the risk of violence. In search of true justice and lasting peace, we wrestle and argue with one another and even with God!

So often our power struggles – personal or communal – flow out of a misunderstanding of power. We often fail to believe in the power that we already have – our capacity to love, forgive, be generous, sacrifice, persuade and invite, inspire and motivate. From the first cry of a new-born child to the death-rattle of a dying loved one, power resides: at both ends of the life spectrum and in all cases of human weakness and vulnerability, the one apparently most dependent has the power to get our attention and to draw us together. And then, there are those that officially have “power” but may not know how to use it effectively or properly. As individuals and groups, we struggle to find our own voice and to hear the cries of those without a voice so as to find a way to bring about changes we believe are just and necessary.

Many of our challenges with power are rooted in the struggle to define it. What exactly do we mean by “power?” For instance, when I mentioned to one of my parishioners that the magazine was going to address this theme she replied “Power – that’s a rather ‘upper-class’ concern – isn’t it?” Her question lingers in my mind. I am not quite sure what she meant but I suspect it has to do with the fact that many people do not even have the vocabulary to articulate their struggle for power; they have no words to speak and no one seems interested in listening. Again, what is power and who has it? Throughout this issue, hopefully you will see and hear reinforced time and again the Christian conviction that every person has power; power has to do with potential and as long as we live and breathe, we can influence people and things. While power can at times be abused through manipulation or control, much of the time power can be a force for good, especially when it is shared power flowing out of a common vision, a power on its knees in service of the common good.

Msgr. James McNamara of the Rockville Center Diocese in New York has ministered for four decades in his home diocese, in Rome and Assisi. In his essay, he reflects on power as passion, the power of “being with,” compassion. Father Mark Stelzer offers us the classic confrontation of truth and power: John the Baptist before Herod, Jesus before Pilate, the prophets challenging the Kings of Israel and Pope

Francis questioning bureaucracy in the Curia. Fr. Stelzer brings this tension even closer to home as he invites every reader to consider the truth in our own life – that is, addiction and fear, jealousy and anger; our need for forgiveness and change, repentance and renewal.

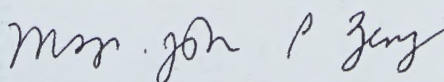
Sister Gilmary Bauer, RSM, tackles the question of how we can develop our capacity for mercy and compassion. From her extensive experience as an educator and congregational leader, Sr. Gilmary demonstrates in concrete and vivid ways the power we have to be changed through hospitality, humor and contemplation. Capuchin Father Richard Hart takes up a theme that has been an on-going focus of his own ministry as a preacher and confessor – the power of the powerless. Paraphrasing St. Paul to the effect that when we are humanly the weakest, we are spiritually the strongest, Fr. Hart reassures us of our power and challenges us to use it! Finally, a companion piece comes to us from a religious in Australia. Fr. Gerry O’Neill challenges us to stretch our imagination and develop a new vision which sees beyond the classical world view; he invites us to consider the exciting possibility of actually entering into the unfolding mystery of the cosmos. His essay resonates with thoughts of Pope Francis in his recently published encyclical *Laudato Si*; he reminds us that our power is shared not only with all other human beings, but even nature itself. He foreshadows an issue we hope to address in the future when we will apply the Pope’s message on the environment to our own ministry.

As in the past, many of the articles have a response from someone in a related field or with a slightly different perspective. There are also questions for reflection and/or discussion. Another new feature in this and future issues is “Voices from the Margins,” our effort to do what Pope Francis suggests – listening to the people of God who are in vulnerable circumstances and therefore, very close to God.

When I was asked to consider the possibility of becoming executive editor of this great journal, I insisted on meeting with the Editorial Board to see whether I would meet their needs and vision for the magazine. We started going around the table with each of them telling how they got involved with Guest House and the magazine. As they shared their perspective and experience, they naturally also asked questions of me and quite accidentally, we were starting to plan this first issue. Before long, with one voice, they simply said: it seems you are already doing the job, so, shall we make it official? How could I say no?! I was reminded of the ending of Dorothy Day’s powerful and compelling autobiography *The Long Loneliness*. I paraphrase her words: Peter Maurin and myself and others were just sitting there talking about all these things and there was a knock on the door, someone in need. And so it was that we began this great mission. We were just sitting there talking and it is still going on...

Such is life and ministry for all of us: who knows where and how it began; who knows where and how it will end. We are “in the middle” of a life-long conversation, listening and responding to the Lord of power and humility, letting the strength of His presence perfect our weaknesses. May this conversation, reflection and dialogue sustain us all as we continue together on our pilgrim way.

Your brother in the Lord,



Msgr. John Zenz  
Human Development Magazine Executive Editor

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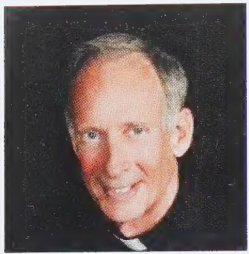




*But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.*

*-2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)*

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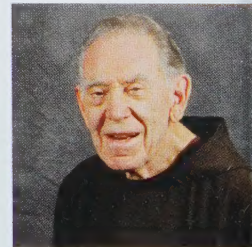
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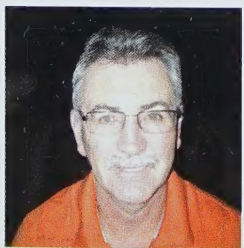
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William A. Barry, S.J. has been a Jesuit for 64 years and a priest for 52. He earned a doctorate in clinical psychology from the University of Michigan in 1968. He has taught at the University of Michigan, Weston Jesuit School of Theology and Boston College and engaged in administrative work in the Society of Jesus. From 1988-1991 he was rector of the Jesuit Community at Boston College and on the Board of Trustees. From 1991 to 1997 he was provincial of the Jesuits of New England. At present he gives retreats and spiritual direction at Campion Renewal Center, Weston, MA and elsewhere. He is the author of twenty books, the latest book being *Praying the Truth: Deepening Your Friendship with God through Honest Prayer* published by Loyola Press in 2012.



BRENDAN CALLAGHAN, S.J.

Brendan Callaghan SJ is the Novice-Director for the four Jesuit Provinces of Britain, Ireland, Flanders and the Netherlands, and is based in Birmingham in England. A psychologist of religion, he previously taught and worked for 30 years at Heythrop College and for 5 years at Campion Hall, the Jesuit foundations in the Universities of London and Oxford. He has also been involved in Jesuit formation, as a local superior of Jesuit formation communities in London and as Formation Delegate for the British Province.



SR. CARROLL JULIANO, SHCJ

Sr. Carroll Juliano, SHCJ is a presenter and facilitator for a variety of church organizations and groups. She has worked both nationally and internationally. She is also an author of six books and numerous articles. Sr. Carroll currently serves as Safe Environment Coordinator for the Diocese of Wilmington.



# POWER AS PASSION

By Msgr. James McNamara

*The fighting fish image represents this idea of Power as Passion. The Siamese fighting fish, also sometimes colloquially known as the betta, is a species in the gourami family which is popular as an aquarium fish. They are called pla-kad in Thai or trey krem in Khmer. They are aggressive towards their own species.*



## RECOGNIZING POWER

To exist is to have power. Of itself, power is not a moral issue. How we use power and what kind of power we exercise determines its moral import. We can all recall situations where we felt powerless. But maybe we had more power than we realized.

Many people might feel powerless trying to help a loved one addicted to drugs or alcohol. As a young priest I confronted a loved one over the abuse of alcohol. I was perhaps naïve in thinking my words would make a difference. I thought I would be heard and accepted. I spoke honestly and with care. In response the person attacked me. Who did I think I was? And on and on. As I drove away, and my eyes were flooded with tears, I had to stop the car. No question I felt powerless. However, a few months later, perhaps even a year, the person looked in the mirror one morning, admitted he had a problem and looked up the number for AA. Did I plant a seed? Perhaps. I would like to think so. But, more importantly, this man faced the truth and the truth set him free. He went on to live a life of sobriety and to help others. There is often wisdom in the belief that good things will happen in God's time, not necessarily our time. Unfortunately, not all stories end happily. All too often people endure the loss of a loved one who was on the path of destruction for many years.

The failure to recognize the power we possess simply because of one's existence, can become an adversary to the spiritual life because it fails to recognize our potential for good; it is a subtle rejection of our dignity as created in God's image and likeness. On the other hand, innocence can be an adversary of the spiritual life when it fails to take account of our potential to do evil things. Nor is naiveté necessarily a virtue since evil can be all the more powerful when it is not recognized. In the spiritual life it is important to be in touch with our capacity for evil as well as for good.

## FIVE FORMS OF POWER

Power can take several forms in our lives. It can be active or passive. It can be used for good and for evil. We might distinguish five kinds of power, all of which can exist simultaneously within us and among us, both in desire and in action. The first kind of power is destructive or exploitative: one holds power over another person as in slavery or human trafficking. The horrific image of a masked ISIS soldier standing over a simply clad Christian with the intent to behead him is a contemporary example of destructive power. The second kind of power is similar to the first - manipulative power - but here there may be some cooperation on the part of the other person. We are all familiar with people trying to manipulate us to do something we do not wish to do or to keep us from saying or doing something. Exploitative and manipulative power are negative forces and have no place in Christian life.

The third type of power is competitive, i.e., power against another person. Competition can be a good thing, as in sports. An opponent can often bring out the best in us.

There are two other forms of power both of which are positive and constructive. Nutrient power is power for the other person. This is most clearly expressed in parents' care for their children. What mother would not spend countless sleepless nights in a hospital with a child who is ill? What father would not ask



God to take his life but spare the life of his child? My niece has a son who is severely disabled. Nicky needs care seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. I marvel at how much his parents love him and delight in him these seventeen years. They can tell when he is happy or sad even though he cannot communicate. Nurturing love is a love for the other person and it expresses great power.

The last kind of power is power with the other person. It can be called "integrative power" or compassion." In this situation, the persons are seen as equals. Growth takes place when this kind of power is lived in mutual respect and care.



*ALL FIVE FORMS  
OF POWER  
FLOW FROM AN  
INDIVIDUAL'S  
SENSE OF  
SIGNIFICANCE*

## DISCOVERING OUR ABIDING SIGNIFICANCE

All five of these forms of power, whether they are positive or negative, constructive or destructive, flow from an individual's personal sense of significance or insignificance. The virtue of humility is key here. By "humility" we mean genuine honesty, knowing who we are before God. If we think too much or too little of ourselves we fail in love because we are not enough about the good of the other person. Insecurity paralyzes the prospects for love. We cannot give what we do not think we have to give. And self-importance distracts us from

love because it fails to recognize the source of our love, namely, a loving Creator God. All is grace. All is gift.

Lacking this Christian vision, people look for significance in the pursuit of power and prestige, in the accumulation of material goods or wealth, in the mad scramble for pleasure and recognition. We think that the one who dies with the most toys wins. Of course, we know this is not true; it is simply vanity. When we expect other people to take our loneliness away, we smother the spontaneity, freedom and vitality out of the relationship. As in the message of the angel at the empty tomb (seemingly a symbol of powerlessness) we are looking among the dead for someone who is alive.

The search for significance is a fundamental human cry. Hearing affirming words – even from loving people – is never adequate. We need to discover our significance within our own lived experience. This process involves self-affirmation, self-assertion and self-expression. Initially experienced as needs, they can become expressions of power when they are directly and honestly addressed. Self-affirmation does not take place in a void but through interaction with others. I can best express this with a story from my childhood. I had tons of freckles as a kid. I was very self-conscious about them, not wanting to be different and fearful of being picked on. My father, a very positive person, told me they were Irish diamonds, signs of God's love. I accepted his words and it really made a difference. You may find the explanation humorous but, for me, it was a grace because it came from my father. He took the time to talk to me. In a simple and lighthearted way, he helped me to feel good about myself. As I will indicate at the end of these reflections, he was there to reassure me.

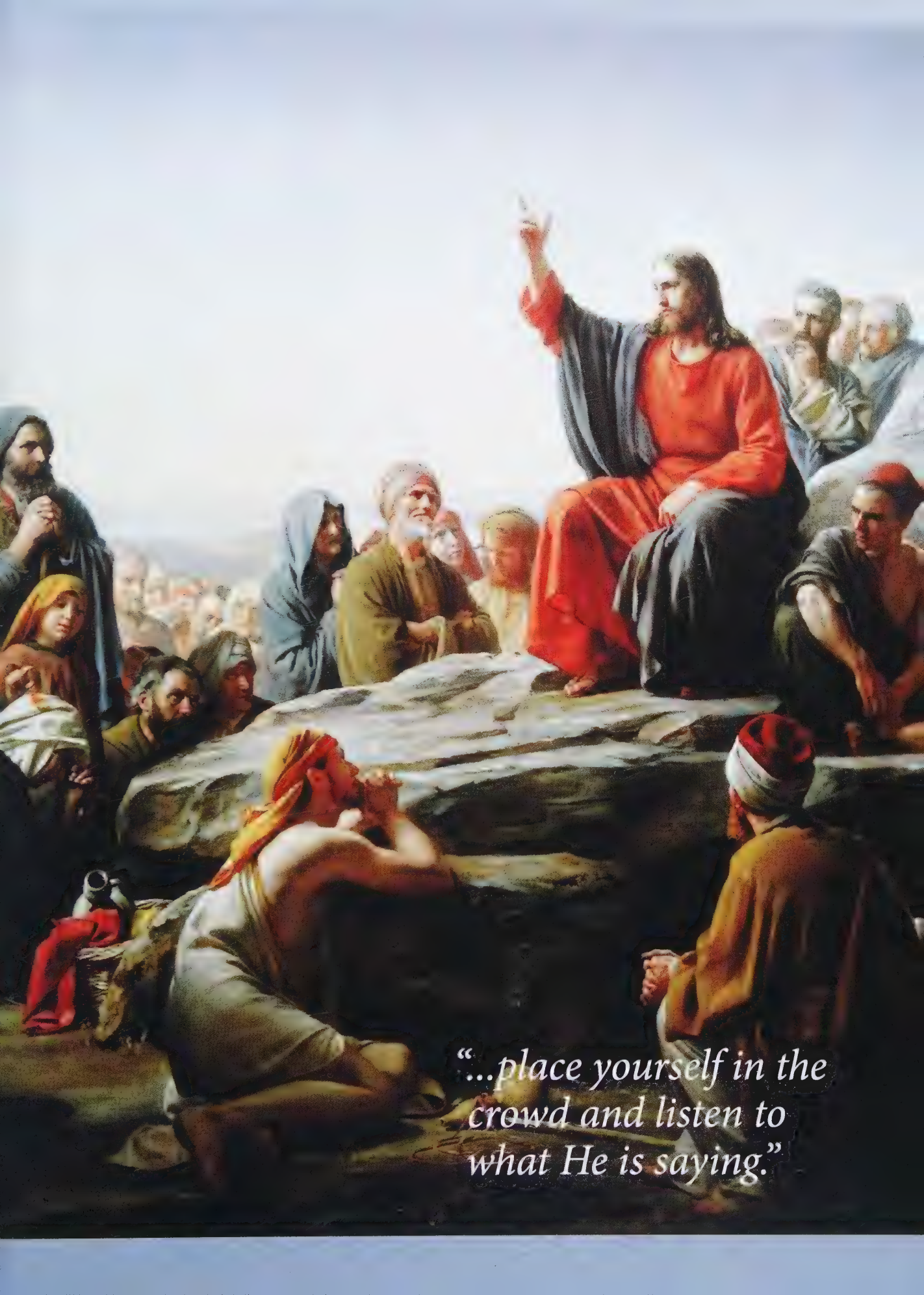
Self-affirmation is not selfish or self-centered. Healthy spiritual growth involves giving of ourselves. And giving of ourselves involves a recognition that we have something to give. What is the proper response to a compliment?

Often, people initially deny the compliment but treasure it later when alone. Rather than "Oh, it was nothing" or "I'm not really that good," the proper response would be "Thank you." Recognize the gift and then give the gift away. Self-affirmation is a basic form of power. Self-assertion and self-expression are ways of living out our self-worth.

There was a popular catch phrase some years ago that went like this: I'm ok and you're ok. It was actually the title of a book. I was never satisfied with that. I'm ok and you're ok but it is ok not to be ok. That is why Jesus Christ came. We need a savior. We cannot save ourselves. So we should think positively about ourselves but recognize, once again, that all is grace, all is gift.

## JESUS AND THE POWER OF COMPASSION

Jesus Christ was the most fully integrated person who ever walked the face of the Earth. He came among us as one of us and one with us. He was like us in all things but sin. Why would we not want to get to know him better? He can be found in the living Word of God, in itself, a form of power. An Ignatian method of praying the Scriptures involves imaging the Gospel scene and putting oneself in the scene. If Jesus is speaking to a crowd, place yourself in the crowd and listen to what He is saying. Even where you place yourself in the crowd will tell you something about your relationship with Christ. If Jesus is speaking to an individual, be that individual. Bring your hopes and fears, your doubts and aspirations to Christ and He will hear you and heal you. Look into the eyes of Christ and you will see compassion. Listen to the voice of Christ and you will hear gentleness. We need to move beyond a romantic or distant image of Christ to meet the living person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who continues to be present among us precisely in a hidden, humble fashion. What Jesus has to say is important and His words have power but His person is even more important: He invites us into a relationship of shared power!



*“...place yourself in the  
crowd and listen to  
what He is saying.”*

Here we discover power as passion, indeed, compassion. Is power itself contrary to the Gospel way of life? What kind of power did Jesus espouse in proclaiming the Kingdom of God? Do the Beatitudes advocate against power? Is meekness weakness? Are peacemakers powerless?

One of the most passionate statements of Jesus can be found in Luke's Gospel: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!" (12:49 – 50). Can you hear the compassion in the voice of Christ? Can you appreciate the passion in His purpose?

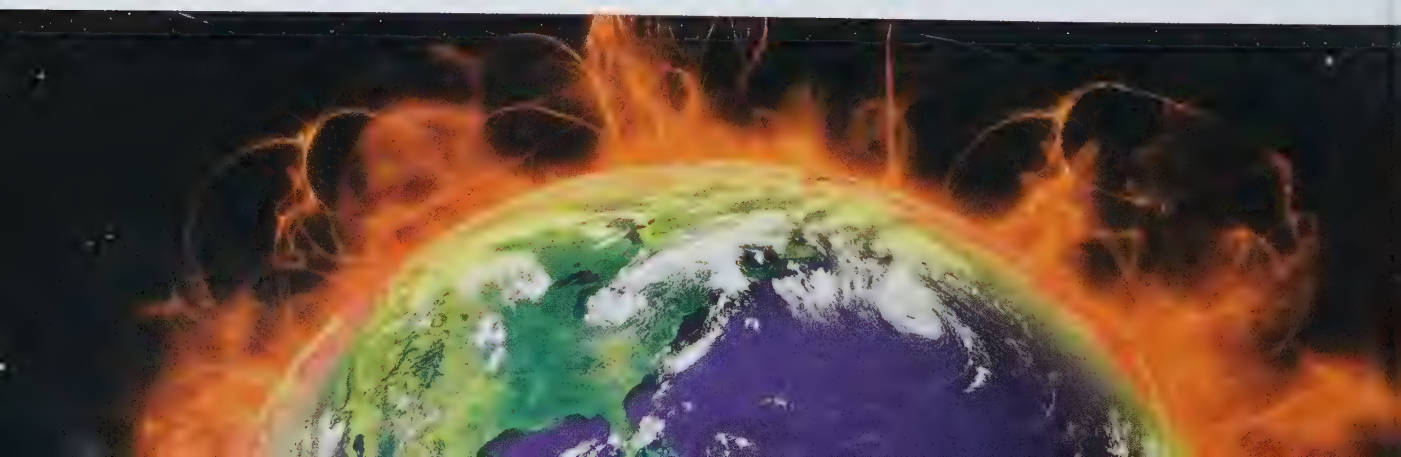
If we look at the three years of Christ's ministry upon this earth, we can gain some valuable insights into His understanding of power and His use of power. Think back for a moment on the five kinds of power we have seen. You will not find Jesus using the destructive forms of power described as exploitative and manipulative. Rather, we find Jesus identifying with the lost, the last, and the least. In fact at the outset of His ministry, in dialogue with Satan, He resisted the attractive pull of external power: He embodied the power of service and mercy.

Jesus challenges His followers by reversing the way of the world. As He tells Pilate, His power is not power in the way the world defines it. His power is the power of love that flows from the community of love we call the trinity and from community and families that are always

"there" for each other. Again, the power of presence, compassion, being with the other.

The power Jesus exercised was never power over others but for others and with others. His miracles brought healing to the blind, the paralyzed, those who could not hear and those who could not speak. While on His way to the house of Jairus, a woman with a hemorrhage touched the tassel of His garment. "Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?'" (Mark 5:30). The power that left Him was the power of healing, and nurturing, integrative power. His compassion brought forgiveness of sins to those who had gone astray. His preaching brought comfort and hope. Miracles of healing, forgiveness of sins and preaching the Word are exercises of power.

These miracles are meant to be signs; that is, they point to something deeper, something more important. The feeding of the five thousand was impressive and they sought Him out for more of the same the next day. But that miraculous event was hardly important in comparison to the abundance of God's love being poured out upon humanity through Jesus Christ. The friends of the paralyzed man were so determined to get him walking again that they took the roof apart in order to get Jesus' attention. And they were none too happy to have gone through all that trouble only to have the poor chap's sins forgiven. But Jesus did not back down. "Jesus immediately knew in his mind what they were thinking to themselves, so he said, 'Why are you thinking such things



in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, pick up your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth"—He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home'" (Mark 2: 8 – 11).

Power is a given: it is an inevitable and unavoidable reality in our world. Power itself is not evil. The use of certain forms of power or the abuse of power is where several questions arise. Exploitative and manipulative power are forms of power that are incongruent with the Gospel because they are power over others. Nutrient and integrative power are congruent with the Gospel precisely because they are power at the service of others. Jesus offered a new definition of power – a gift, a potential to love – a capacity every human being has inherent within.

Psychologically, understanding the meaning of power and the power of meaning is healthy and necessary. Holiness and wholeness are meant to work in harmony with each other. In other words, spiritual development and human growth go hand in hand in the development of a healthy human being. A false sense of powerlessness is an obstacle to both spiritual growth and psychological health. Self-affirmation, self-assertion, and self-expression are fundamental to the issue of power in regard to one's sense of oneself. As people of faith, as followers of Jesus Christ, denial of self does not mean the negation of one's goodness but the discovery of one's true identity in Christ.

### COMPASSION: THE POWER OF LOVE

Compassion ties power and love together.

It is one of the most important qualities of the spiritual life. If compassion is understood properly as the interplay between power and love, it becomes a fundamental link between people. In compassion, no one and nothing is alien to us. Thomas Merton once thanked God that he was like the rest of men. Compassion puts us in touch with people in their struggles: compassion is a great equalizer. Compassion opens me up to my own wounds and also to my own capacity for evil. In compassion nothing is foreign to me. I may despise the evil I encounter in another person but I can see in myself the same painful struggle to trust love, to give up pride, fear, control, anger and ambition.

Compassion contains power not as a force over another person but as a source of understanding and strength. Therefore, compassion leads to community, to seeing my neighbor as one who shares the same joys and sorrows I do. Compassion is ultimately God's power shining through each person open to the story of Jesus Christ unfolding within and among us. We all have power but it's fundamentally Christ's power, Christ's compassion!

### AND FINALLY...

When I was in the third grade I served the 8:00 a.m. Mass on Sundays. My father would drive me up to Church and then return home to collect the rest of the family. It was a big deal to be up at Church all by myself. As Mass began, I was facing away from the people and not sure if my family was there. But my father had a distinctive way of clearing his throat and he inevitably did so as Mass began. I felt reassured and safe.

**A FALSE SENSE OF POWERLESSNESS IS AN OBSTACLE  
TO BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH.**

Many years passed and as a young priest I had to say a funeral Mass for a family of six who were murdered in their home. The Church was packed with people. As I got into the pulpit to preach, I heard the sound of my father clearing his throat. My eyes darted around until I saw him in a far off corner. I had the same feeling of reassurance I had once enjoyed as a little boy. I felt empowered to fulfill the ministry of preaching consolation and mercy. There was great power in that reassuring gesture, even though my dad did not even realize it: It had to do with history, relationship and grace.

Is that not what you and I seek today as we form others for service in the Church? We seek the reassuring voice of Christ and we hear His compassion being spoken through us! Him in the Word of God. We look into the eyes of Christ and we see compassion at work in the heart of the one listening. As Pope Francis would say, we become a people of compassion, a church of mercy.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Power can be defined as potential, a drive, a passion searching for fulfillment, a perceived lack of something, a desire to be fulfilled. In my life and ministry have I seen times and ways that a certain “emptiness”/hunger/incompleteness within me was a blessing that moved me to action, perhaps even to leadership?

When I have been in positions of authority or leadership, how did I exercise the power confided to me? Power over? Power for? Power with?

Reflecting on the Gospels, do I see the paradox of how Jesus often “gave” to others by placing himself in the position of being a receiver? How might I do the same at this time in my life?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Msgr. James McNamara was Ordained in 1971 for the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York. Msgr. McNamara has served in a variety of ministries including Spiritual Director at Immaculate Conception Seminary, Huntington, NY (1978 – 1982) and Director of Advising at the North American College in Rome (1982 – 1987). He has also been very involved in ministry to priests and was Director of Priest Personnel for the Rockville Centre Diocese. Besides serving as Pastor of Miraculous Medal Church in Point Lookout, NY, he is also an Episcopal Vicar for the Central Vicariate of the Rockville Centre Diocese. Msgr. McNamara has authored a number of books and articles including *The Power of Compassion* (Paulist Press 1983).

# IN MY OPINION



## CLINICAL REFLECTION ON POWER AS PASSION

Claudia Black

*I use my power that is founded in compassion, respect and truth to guide my clinical direction.*

Claudia Black, Ph. D.

Having worked in the field of addictions for the past forty years, the issue of power is a foundational element of therapy with both family members and the addicted.

How does a child growing up with addiction in the family shift from feeling so alone, afraid, helpless and powerless, to finding a power within to embrace a recovery that lets go of a self-defeating family script and offers choices in their life?

How does the partner of an addict, who so often feels they should have the power to stop their loved one from drowning in their substance, reconcile their own powerlessness over the disease and find power in the concept of surrender?

How do they find their power to move from the sense of defeat or victim stance that is so common, to one of hope and accountability for self?

How do the addicted, whose drug of choice gives them a sense of power compensating for their feelings of insecurity, defeat and powerlessness, give that drug up? How do they let go of the false belief that they have the power to control their

usage and behavior while under the influence?

As a clinician, I need to use my power to create a safe environment for clients to take that journey inward, to lessen their defenses, to give voice to their truth, to identify their own values and needs, and to explore healthy ways of getting their needs met. A part of my responsibility is to help them address their fears and put those fears into a realistic perspective, to help them move through their shame. A part of their becoming empowered is recognizing who is responsible for what and in that context establishing healthy boundaries.

Power for many begins with understanding. I need to offer clients an educational framework so they understand what has happened in their lives. In essence, I create a safety container wherein they are encouraged and supported in continuing to take one foot forward taking ownership of their past, attending to their own pain and becoming responsible for how they want to live their life today.

I have no doubt the actualization of a healthy power is a spiritual experience. Faith and control do not peacefully co-exist.

The issue of control is integral to unhealthy forms of power. The letting go, the surrendering process of that which we falsely attach ourselves to, e.g., an unhealthy partner, the drug, the belief we are not of value, requires a faith that life is better without being all knowing. "Let Go, Let God" is one of the initial steps of acceptance within the 12 step programs of recovery for both family members and the addicted. It is in the letting go of the need for power over, the controlling of people, places and things that is the beginning of finding healthy power.

**Claudia Black, Ph. D.** is a renowned author and trainer internationally recognized for her pioneering and contemporary work with family systems and addictive disorders.



TRUTH

# TRUTH SPEAKS TO POWER

by Mark Stelzer



## INTRODUCTION

Since the papal election of Jorge Bergoglio in 2013, discussions concerning the relationship of truth to power in the Church have been given considerable attention. The pope's choice of the name Francis quickly conveyed an agenda of reform and renewal. In formal and informal interactions with believers and non-believers alike, Francis demonstrates a willingness to re-think all things, including conventional notions of truth and power.

Nowhere is the tension between truth and power more clearly evident in stark contrast than Jesus before Pilate: the prisoner had no apparent power, only the truth of his very being and the Roman Governor, with considerable authority, had no grounding in the truth. Pilate's timeless question- "What is truth?" (Jn 18:38) – tugs at the mind and heart of all who recognize the power they themselves hold. Actually the real question should be: Am I truthful?

Relying on insights gained from Scripture and liberation theology, this essay will suggest that truth, by its very nature, is subversive and has a way of transforming real or perceived power. Using Francis' Christmas 2014 address to the Roman Curia as a poignant example of truth speaking to power, this essay then offers some reflections on the complex dynamics at play when clergy and religious name the truth spoken by personal pain and begin the journey of transformation and recovery.

In his relatively short but dense work, *Truth Speaks to Power* (2013), Walter Brueggemann (an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and professor emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary) examines the interplay between truth and power in the Old Testament. A skillful exegete, Brueggemann carefully weaves into his study concerns raised by Paul Ricoeur, Michel Foucault and other linguistic and social theorists all of whom remain leery of any claim to absolute truth or absolute power. As Brueggemann says, the skepticism of Ricoeur and other “masters of suspicion” is fully congruent with the subversive voice of Scripture which may be appropriately interpreted as “a sustained contestation over truth in which conventional modes of power do not always prevail.” (p. 6)

Using Solomon and Josiah as examples, Brueggemann makes two claims relevant for our present consideration of truth and power: (1) truth subverts; and (2) truth transforms.

### TRUTH SUBVERTS

The story of Solomon inevitably comes to mind when we think about truth and its relationship to power in the Old Testament. Representing the apex of power in ancient Israel, Solomon was called to establish a new world order in Jerusalem, the city of shalom. Solomon, whose very name is likewise derived from the term shalom, was to be the bringer of wholeness and peace.

Hailed by all for the building of the temple which became a visible sign of his power, Solomon is also presented as one who possesses wisdom and truth:

Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. The whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. (1 Kgs 10:23-24)

Despite the initial appeal of the Solomon narrative, we must follow Brueggemann’s lead and pay careful attention to the deception that surrounds Solomon’s rise to power and eventual ascent to the throne of David, his father. We must not forget that Solomon colludes with his mother, Bathsheba (1 Kgs 2:14) and Nathan, the court prophet, to denounce Abonijah, Solomon’s own brother, so that Solomon might succeed the ailing David. The plot only thickens when, soon after his machinated election, King Solomon judges Abonijah guilty of impurity and summarily orders his execution. (1 Kgs 2:25) As Brueggemann emphasizes, in Solomon’s case, power achieved by deception is accompanied by violence. Even more poignant is the fact that Solomon attempts to legitimize claims to ill-gained power through ritual acts of temple piety.

Solomon’s exercise of what Brueggemann terms “pharonic power” ignores the legitimate power of Yahweh. Fueling Solomon’s exercise of pharonic power at every level was a quest for “more.” According to Brueggemann :

FUELING SOLOMON'S EXERCISE OF PHARONIC POWER WAS A QUEST FOR "MORE."



The cry of the system, already in Exodus 5 is “more”: more bricks, more labor, more exploitation of labor, all in the response to the nightmare of scarcity ... [T]he story of Solomon’s reign is the story of accumulation, for raw, unrestrained power is always in the service of more, regardless of the political or economic system that is paid to prevail.

As often the case in Old Testament narratives, eventually Torah truth confronts the powerful Solomon and his regime. In a dream recounted in Kings 3:4-7, Solomon is given a clear choice: to speak before the Lord with integrity and remain established on his throne forever or to continue turning away from Yahweh and be cut off from the land he and his people had been given.

Because Solomon persists in his unfettered quest for more, his regime is ultimately overthrown and the temple is destroyed. False claims to power could not be sustained in the face of Torah truth. The Solomon narrative reminds us truth is subversive. It has a way of displacing illegitimate or misused power.

### III TRANSFORMS

Another central figure in the Book of Kings is Josiah. Grandson of the notoriously disobedient King Manasseh, Josiah is presented as the good king:

Before him [Josiah] there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might according to the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him. (2 Kgs 23:25)

In contrast to his grandfather, Josiah’s power is informed by and exercised according to the truth given in the Torah. To quote Brueggemann (2013): Josiah functions in the tradition “to attest that power can serve truth, even as truth can guide, energize, and authorize a particular act of power.”

Much of Josiah’s acclaim follows from his dramatic response to the reading of an old scroll discovered during the renovation of the temple long-neglected by his grandfather, Manasseh. (2 Kgs 22:11) When the scroll condemning abuses of power and negligence of the Torah is read, Josiah tears his garment in an act of public penitence. Heeding the words of an oracle whose advice he subsequently seeks, Josiah commits himself to the task of reestablishing public order in Judah in obedience to Torah truth. Deeply transformed on a personal level by the truth contained in the scroll, Josiah was then able to effect transformation throughout Judah.



In his comments on the transformative power of truth witnessed in the person of Josiah, Brueggemann goes to considerable length to point out that Josiah's reforms, in many ways, resonate with the agenda of liberation theology. In particular, the scroll's command to love one's neighbor and its declaration of a "year of favor" characterized by the forgiveness of debt remind us of some of the ways in which liberation theology relies upon the transformative power of truth in the face of unjust abuses of power. Liberation theology reminds us of the risks at stake when truth speaks to power.

## INSIGHTS FROM LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Defined by Gustavo Gutiérrez in *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* as "a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the Word of God," liberation theology is especially attentive to ways in which the great biblical narratives such as those of Solomon and Josiah inform theology. By careful analysis and prayerful reflection on lessons learned from Scripture and the social teaching of the Church, liberation theologians seek to interpret the concrete historical experience of oppression often manifest in the circumstances of the poor. Then liberation theologians develop strategies and viable tactics in response to personal biases, structures or systems thought to be the source of oppression.

In this process of analyzing the concrete historical experience of the poor, liberation theologians do not avoid the hard questions raised when individuals or groups make claims to truth or power. As Jon Sobrino insists, it is the Church of the poor – liberation theology's preferred image of the Church – that vociferously raises the question of God and his kingdom, along with the questions of love, justice, sin, truth and power. In *The True Church and the Poor*, Sobrino emphasizes: The poor keep alive the ethical demands

of Christianity and the need to give these [demands] a concrete embodiment."

The "poor" force us to face the truth we might otherwise ignore. The condition of their vulnerability unmasks the often false pretensions of our social values: the truth spoken by the poor challenges and transforms traditional notions of power. As Pope Francis reminds almost daily, the poor are like a corrective lens. They help us see truth and power without filters.

## POPE FRANCIS CHALLENGES THE CURIA

Much attention has been directed in secular and religious media to Pope Francis' 2014 Christmas address to the Roman Curia. Delivered in Clementine Hall, this much-quoted address caught listeners, who expected a somewhat benign extension of perfunctory seasonal greetings, off-guard. The address reminds us that truth is, at times, unnerving. The address serves as a poignant example of truth speaking to power.

Clearly reflecting lessons learned from liberation theology about truth and power, Francis' Christmas address to the Curia begins with a brief analysis of some principles of Vatican II ecclesiology.

In that succinct summary of ecclesiology, Pope Francis invites his listeners to join him in thinking of the Curia as a "small-scale model of the Church" in which the Spirit gives various gifts for the welfare of the entire Church. Appealing to the rich imagery of the vine and its branches found in John 15:4-5, Francis goes on to remind members of the Curia that they – like the Church – cannot live "without a vital personal, authentic and solid relationship with Christ." Apart from Christ who identifies himself as "the way, the truth, and the life," (Jn 14:6) the Church – and therefore, its Curia -- can do nothing.

His brief summary of ecclesiology completed, Francis (2014) proceeds to the major part of the Christmas address: a listing of what he calls “diseases of the Curia”:

The disease of thinking we are “immortal,” “immune” or downright “indispensable.”

The disease of excessive busy-ness, i.e., the “Martha complex.”

The disease of mental and spiritual “petrification” found in those who have a heart of stone.

The disease of excessive planning and functionalism.

The disease of poor coordination, i.e., losing a sense of communion and harmonious functioning.

The disease of losing memory of our personal salvation history, i.e., “Spiritual Alzheimer’s.”

The disease of rivalry and vainglory.

The disease of living a double-life, i.e., “existential schizophrenia.”

The disease of gossiping, grumbling and back-biting.

The disease of idolizing superiors in the hope of gaining favor.

The disease of indifference to others.

The disease of the lugubrious face.

The disease of hoarding.

The disease of closed circles, where belonging to a clique becomes more important than belonging to the Body of Christ.

The disease of worldly profit, i.e., turning service into an exercise of brute power.

Although specifically addressed to the Roman Curia, Pope Francis used this

Christmas address as a means to remind all believers that these diseases “are a danger and temptation for each Christian and for every curia, community, congregation, parish, and ecclesial movement.” These diseases strike at the level of the individual and the community. They afflict clergy and religious alike. No individual and no structure is immune to these temptations.

Taken collectively, these fifteen diseases are much more than indicators of individual or collective pathologies. In the estimation of our Holy Father, these diseases present an opportunity for renewal and transformation. The antidote to these diseases is simple and straightforward: truth which takes a risk and speaks to power.

#### TRUTH SPEAKS TO CLERGY, RELIGIOUS AND LEADERSHIP

In Twelve Step recovery circles, it is not uncommon to be reminded that personal transformation begin when “honesty and truth collide.” Sometimes associated with the moment of “spiritual awakening,” the collision of honesty and truth initiates a slow process of seeing all things – most especially ourselves – in a new way.

For clergy and religious on a journey of personal transformation – including the journey of recovery from an addictive disorder of any sort – the interplay between truth and power is an important consideration. For spiritual directors, therapists and counselors working with clergy and religious on this journey, the interplay between truth and power is likewise an important consideration. Likewise, for diocesan and religious superiors referring a cleric or religious to counselling or treatment, the interplay between truth and power is an important, yet often-overlooked, consideration.

In all of the cases just mentioned, any examination of the relationship between

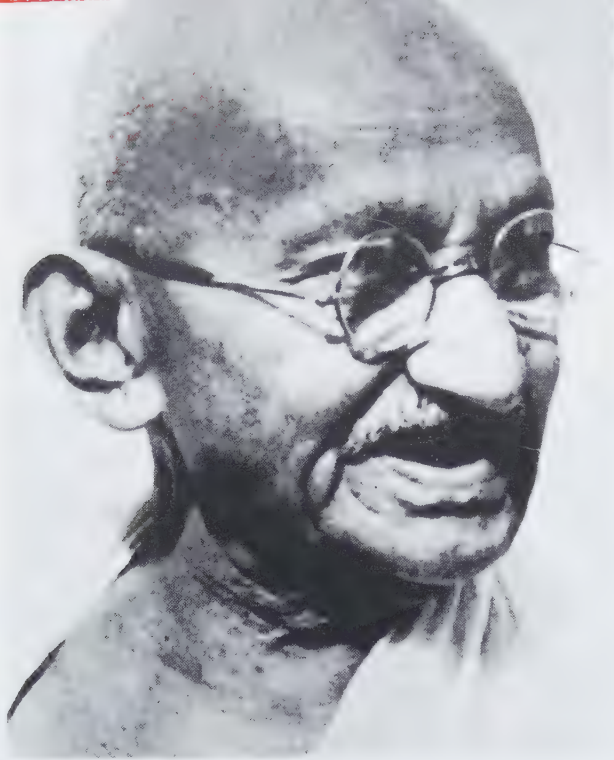


truth and power must recognize that by the time a cleric or religious actually begins the work of transformation and recovery, years perhaps even decades have frequently passed in which the truth pointing to the need for transformation and recovery has remained unspoken or denied. As a result, some combination of the curial diseases enumerated by Pope Francis can manifest themselves. Eventually, the individual and his or her diocesan or religious superiors come to a gradual – though yet unspoken – awareness that something has to change.

As noted above, clergy and religious beginning the process of transformation and recovery often do so following years or even decades of silence or denial on the part of those who know and love them very dearly and deeply. For a multitude of reasons, family members, friends, parishioners and even colleagues in the “inner circle” of the life of a cleric or religious are usually the least likely

to bring to his or her attention any problematic thought patterns or behaviors. This hesitancy to confront can continue for years, despite the fact that unhealthy patterns of thinking and/or behavior are compromising their loved one’s ministry and life itself.

Often the hesitancy to confront is the result of a well-intended, but misguided, sense of loyalty or allegiance. The faulty and usually unspoken assumption is that “friends and family do not confront friends and family.” Other times the hesitancy to confront flows from an idealized notion of the clerical state and religious life learned early in childhood. Believing that ordination or religious profession constitute a “higher state of life,” family, friends, and close associates feel that it is inappropriate to challenge their loved one or colleague. They tell themselves that “Father or Sister is always right, even when Father or Sister is wrong!”



Sadly, as the disease process progresses, clergy and religious often capitalize on this perception of superiority to isolate themselves even further from critique or any offer of help. This tendency is especially evident when the proverbial drums “start beating” and signs of external dysfunction (outbursts of rage, extended periods of isolation, legal troubles) begin to be noticed by others. As the threat of confrontation or intervention looms on the horizon, it is not uncommon for clergy or religious to retreat even deeper behind this wall of superiority and its false sense of power.

Whether out of personal loyalty or an idealized notion of the clerical state or religious life, truth fails to speak to the power which the disease itself holds over the troubled individual. As a result, the cleric or religious remains untreated. Like Solomon whose constant quest was for more, the disease process and sheer attempt to hold on to power begin to exact more and more from the cleric or religious. The sad result is even more pain for the cleric or religious and for all who care deeply for him or her. Like Solomon’s temple, the

pieces of the troubled individual’s life begin to crumble. Healing can begin only when truth is spoken.

### WHEN TRUTH SPEAKS

Pain has a way of getting our attention. As Marcel Proust insisted so often, many things in life can be ignored. However, to pain we must listen.

We must listen because pain has a way of speaking truth to the power which unhealthy thought patterns, behaviors, lifestyles, and addictions hold over us. Pain speaks to our claims to power and reminds us that we are not always in control. Pain speaks a truth that breaks through that powerful force we call “denial.”

For anyone embracing the process of transformation and recovery – including clergy and religious -- an important phase of the healing process begins with an invitation to go to what Henri Nouwen calls “the place of pain.” (p. 26)

Having travelled the long and hard road to the place of his own pain, Nouwen emphasizes that this journey is especially difficult because most of us perceive the place of pain as a place of death. Our survival instinct makes us want to run as fast as we can from the pain caused by our unhealthy thinking and behaviors. We try unsuccessfully to manage or medicate the pain on our own. Meanwhile, the “disease” gnawing away at our insides tells us that living with pain – regardless of its severity – is somehow easier than seeking help or entering treatment. There exists a failure to hear the real and deeper truth that pain is speaking to the individual cleric or religious and to diocesan or congregational leadership.

### THE TRUTH SPOKEN TO INDIVIDUAL CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

A careful reading of Nouwen’s collective works suggests at least five truths which

pain speaks to individual clergy and religious engaged in the process of transformation and recovery:

Although intensely personal, my pain is a pain that has somehow been previously felt by another person to one degree or another. I must realize that I am not, in the words of Twelve Step literature, “terminally-unique.” Others have travelled this road before me.

Because others have known a similar pain, I do not have to journey to the place of pain alone. The challenge is to find travel companions who have already journeyed the long and hard road and have emerged healthier. I must also find qualified professionals familiar with the complexities of clerical or religious life to accompany me on this journey.

My pain, though personal, has intentionally or unintentionally caused others pain. I have most likely caused the greatest pain to those I love the most. Whenever possible, I must make amends for the pain I have caused others. Before making these amends, I must seek the counsel of those who accompany me on the journey of transformation and recovery.

I must be clear about my reasons for going to the place of pain. If I go there only to “beat myself up” or to reinforce negative self-images, I am going there for the wrong reasons.

Pain does not have to have the final word. Beyond the place of pain is a place of healing and hope.

### THE FURTHER PROCESS OF LEADERSHIP

Once again following Nouwen’s lead, we can suggest five lessons which the pain of an individual cleric or religious speaks to leadership:

Although the individual seeking help or treatment must take responsibility by owning his/her pain, leadership must

AN IMPORTANT  
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PLACE OF PAIN.”

be aware of any personal complicity on the part of diocesan or congregational leaders – past or present – in causing, perpetuating, or ignoring the pain being experienced by the cleric or religious.

The pain felt by an individual cleric or religious seeking help is not always the result of explicit conflict with a particular diocesan or religious leader. Often, the pain is the result of conflict with the structures, norms, and customs these leaders represent. The journey to healing often begins when a simple “I’m sorry” is voiced by a diocesan or congregational leader. This sincere expression of empathy and apology – reminiscent of Josiah’s public act of confession – goes a long way in alleviating a pain felt for years.

Just as clergy and religious seeking help must carefully choose personal guides for the journey of healing and transformation, leadership making referrals to treatment should rely on the guidance of professionals and established facilities familiar with the unique challenges of clerical and religious life. Almost without exception, Church-affiliated treatment centers are far more effective than their secular counterparts in providing effective primary care to a highly-specialized-population. Church-affiliated treatment centers also provide continuing care after treatment which is cognizant of particular challenges facing clergy and religious at various junctures along the road of recovery.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, clergy and religious emerging from the difficult journey to the place of pain do so with profound new insights into themselves, their world, and the Church they love. They have gained new skills which help them speak truth to power in loving, but direct ways. The truth spoken by the cleric or religious should not be ignored by leadership. As Richard Rohr

insists so often, transformed people transform people.

Although it does not have to have the final word, pain of any kind leaves an indelible scar. As in the case of Jesus whose resurrected body still bore the marks of the Cross, clergy and religious in long-term recovery still bear the marks caused by the cross that led them to seek help. Recovery is not a linear process. At times, individuals may have to revisit their place of pain in light of new insights gained from ongoing recovery. In a similar way, dioceses and religious congregations who have accompanied the cleric or religious on the long journey from illness to wellness bear the marks of the Cross. Church-affiliated treatment centers are uniquely-positioned to help dioceses and religious congregations process this pain. The marks of the Cross born by individuals, dioceses, and religious congregations must be mutually-acknowledged and revered.

## CONCLUSION

Pilate’s perennial question, “What is truth?” continues to challenge clergy, religious and laity on a journey of personal transformation and recovery. Pilate’s question also challenges dioceses and religious congregations served by clergy and religious who have undertaken this intensely personal, and often painful journey, to a place of healing and hope.

Scripture, liberation theology, and Pope Francis remind us of ways in which truth speaks to the power of disease of any kind, including addiction. These same sources remind us of ways in which truth confronts misguided claims to authority.

Relying on the many insights Henri Nouwen gained from his own intensely personal journey to the place of pain, this essay has suggested particular truths which pain speaks to individual clerics, religious, and to diocesan or



congregational leadership. Hope rises up for all because when truth and power meet, all is different! Transformed people can transform structures and systems.

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## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Pope Francis never ceases to surprise and startle all of us by his direct and often blunt honesty. What part of his message or witness has most "stretched" you or made you uncomfortable?

Prophets spoke the message they felt compelled to proclaim and for that, suffered rejection. Have I been "prophetic" in my own community?

How am I, my parish or congregation trying to move from "maintenance" to "mission"?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Mark S. Stelzer, S.T.D., was ordained to the priesthood in 1983 for the Diocese of Springfield, MA. An alumnus of Guest House, Father Mark currently serves as chaplain and faculty member at the College of Our Lady of the Elms in Chicopee, MA where he regularly offers a course "Addiction and Recovery: A Spiritual Journey." Prior to joining the college faculty, Father Mark served in parish and hospital ministries.



# POWER: A CAPACITY FOR GRACE

By: Sister Gilmary Bauer

"The call of Jesus pushes each of us never to stop at the surface of things, especially when we are dealing with a person. We are called to look beyond, to focus on the heart to see of how much generosity everyone is capable."

Pope Francis, Jubilee Year of Mercy

"We could have made the sandwiches better."

Goodstope Middle School for Girls, 2004

While I was working on this reflection, breaking news reported that a young white man, Dylann Roof, had walked into a bible study at an historic African-American church in Charleston, S.C., sat down with church members for a while and listened, but then began to disagree with other participants as they spoke about Scripture. He started venting against African-Americans and opened fire on the group, killing nine and wounding one.

I experienced the all-too-familiar progression of emotions you probably felt as well: disbelief to belief to sorrow to anger to cynicism to weariness to powerlessness. But I could not let myself stay with those feelings. Immediately, I shifted to what had to be done – strategies, plans, efforts, redoubled efforts – trying to sort out the "next right thing to do."

Two days later at Dylann Roof's arraignment, Nadine Collier, the daughter of one of victims, looked at him and said: "I forgive you." Pelecia Sanders, who lost her son, added: "Every fiber in my body hurts, and I will never be the same. But as we said in Bible study, we enjoyed you. May God have mercy on you."



### PUTTING YOUR FINGERS IN THE CUP

With those words I found myself being startled by the capacity for grace and deeply touched by the almost unfathomable and uncompromising mercy of Nadine Collier and Felecia Sanders. Flannery O'Connor once observed *"that if there is any value in hearing writers talk, it will be in hearing what they can witness to and not what they can theorize about. My own approach to literary problems is very like the one Dr. Johnson's blind housekeeper used when she poured tea – she put her finger inside the cup."*

There was nothing theoretical about the power of forgiveness witnessed and shared in the words of these women and other survivors. These women put their fingers in the cup of the Lord's passion before they drank deeply from it; they entered into the power of the Lord's mercy for them and for us all, especially for those who have been the cause of other's pain and loss.

Where did they find the inner resources, the hidden power of grace and mercy? Not knowing these women, I think it amazing, almost miraculous that many of us can be completely, spiritually transformed by a single, momentary experience. I found myself asking the question: "What dispositions and desires do we need to create and deepen within us as a capacity for such grace?"

I was reminded of Thomas Merton's question: "How shall we begin to know who God is if we do not begin ourselves to be something of what God is?" He continues, answering his own question as he says, "We receive enlightenment only in proportion as we give ourselves more and more completely to God by humble submission and love. We do not first see, then act: we act, then see. . . And that is why the man who waits to see clearly, before he will believe, never starts on the journey."

In most instances we cannot make the journey alone. As the saying goes "We do not become saints alone" – that is, holiness necessarily includes communion. We usually have companions for the journey and if we are fortunate, we might even get to choose them. I propose three "companions" that can help us expand our natural openness and disposition for grace: a commitment to being hospitable, a cultivation of humor and a hunger for contemplation.

### HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is not so much a task as it is an attitude, a way of living and sharing ourselves. As the famed preacher Robert McAfee Brown once said, hospitality is not a head trip, but a foot trip. Although it involves faithful performance of duties, hospitality naturally emerges from a grateful heart. More than a responding to human need, it is first and foremost a response of love and gratitude to God's love, welcome and mercy. Hospitality will not occur in any significant way in our lives, homes, or places of worship unless we regularly acknowledge

that God expresses His power in constant mercy and compassion.

The blessings and benefits of hospitality are not always immediately apparent. We do not become hospitable in an instant; we learn it in small increments of daily openness to the gifts and needs of all we encounter.

Many people describe hospitality as the best yet most challenging thing they have ever done. They find it to be the best thing because they sense God's presence in the practice, because it is filled with unexpected blessings, because it is richly satisfying; and because of the opportunities it provides to become friends with many different people.

... better sandwiches

In the mid-1990's a group of women mostly from five different religious congregations came together to explore a plan for Our Lady of Guadalupe, a middle school for girls. Most of the "explorers" lived or ministered in the city and knew first hand the needs and desires of those who lived well below the poverty line, many of them Hispanic.

We saw this as a potential for grace – for the girls, their families, the city, the Archdiocese and our religious congregations. The experience tested not only our desire for grace but also our capacity. Ambivalence, discomfort and lack of clarity or security are unavoidable in any meaningful endeavor! And so it was for all of us in this challenging endeavor. To borrow a remark by T.S.

Eliot about a person he admired: "I cannot conceive of anybody agreeing with all of her views, or of not disagreeing violently with some of them. But agreement and rejection are secondary: what matters is to make contact with a great soul." Certainly we all had pure hearts and good intentions!

After almost six years of study, conversation, needs assessments, asset mapping and listening groups with potential families (to whom we listen determines what we hear), four of the congregations, with some Archdiocesan financial aid, opened Our Lady of Guadalupe Middle School for Girls (OLG). It was a school with an extended day, week, and year-long program with diversified academic curriculum and special emphasis on service.

One Saturday each month was Service Saturday, but to the girls it was Super Saturday, because it freed them from chores at home and offered subs and pizza for their lunch. The day's program was carefully designed to prepare the girls for particular experiences, with an insistence on excellence and mindfulness, being with them during the process and then reflecting on the experience afterwards, with an eye toward integrating the service experience with their "formal" curriculum.

One Saturday they were to serve at a parish soup kitchen that provided meals in an environment that was intentionally respectful and unhurried. Most of the guests are persons without permanent address, many

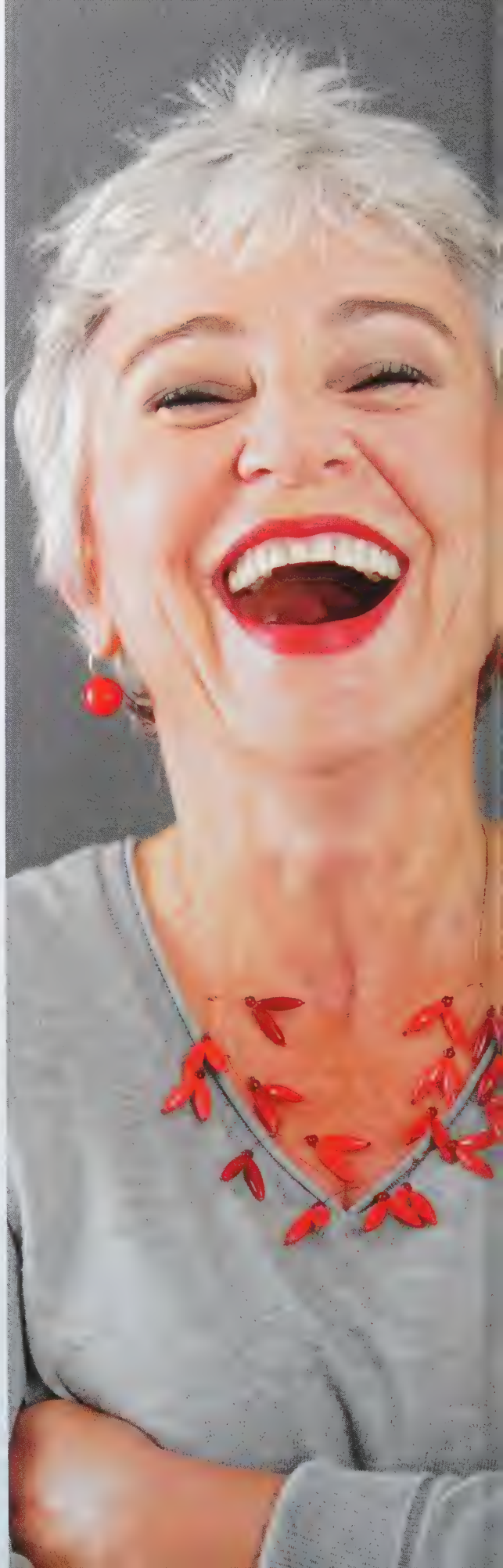
*WE DO NOT FIRST SEE, THEN ACT;  
WE ACT, THEN SEE.*


of whom suffer from multiple physical and mental illnesses, and whose appearance can be off-putting. The girls were to help sweep and clean the dining room, set the tables, make lunch, and show the guests to their places. Not surprisingly, many of the young ladies seemed more focused on the lunch awaiting them at the school rather than the opportunity at hand.

When they returned from St. Leo's Soup Kitchen, I asked them how it had gone. Most replied that it was "all right" and "worth the time." I heard later that one of the girls who often seemed detached, burst into tears and said: "If I had known the people who were about to receive them, we could have made them better sandwiches." She came to see that hospitality is not simply fulfilling a need but doing everything – no matter how simple – with tender love. The power, the capacity, is in the forgetting of self for the sake of love, even of those yet unseen.

Hospitality can be difficult because it involves hard work. Most people struggle with limits of energy and patience. Our society places a high value on control, planning, and efficiency, and hospitality is unpredictable and often inefficient. By way of encouragement Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, often reminded her congregation and herself, that if they wished to bestow the seeds of real hope, "We must witness to a transformation that is ongoing, and the way that we must do it, one person at a time – one answering of the doorbell, one opening the door, one embrace of the stranger, one welcoming of the other, one sharing of our bread and milk – one person at a time."

These "simple" yet powerful acts compel us to make changes in our lives, changes that on one level may be the equivalent of small gestures but which, if cultivated over time, have the potential to reshape our communities and us. This attention to one person at a time is described for us by Letty Russell, a remarkable theologian and pastor who reminds us "[that] hospitality is





a form of partnership with the ones we call ‘other’”, those persons described by Flannery O’Connor as the “extra people in the world.”

## HUMOR

Our second “companion” is humor. Far from blocking moral reflection, humor illuminates our human tendency to be self-absorbed. Humor is not for laughs but for the promotion of honest moral reflection that may embrace the world in all its brokenness and finitude. The comic view of self and the world can puncture our pretensions and self-deceptions.

I was in congregational leadership at a time when, as a Congregation, we were engaged in a significant process of reconfiguring the Community. These were not easy moments as we struggled to share with our members all available data and perspectives. Not surprisingly, this process sometimes created tensions. Once, after a very lively Community meeting, I remembered feeling a bit like Viktor Frankel who during a serious presentation paused to read his audience and observed: “I know I am speaking a marvelous accent without the slightest English.” A humorous touch can certainly lighten the atmosphere.

Comic expression of a moral vision is important, for it does not confront us directly; since humor is not “preachy,” it relaxes our guard. Comedy subverts our defensive posture, and affirms us: through laughter we can often, for the very first time, come to see ourselves as we truly are. The central irony of the moral life is that simply by not taking ourselves so seriously, we may become more serious moral agents and more serious believers, deepening our capacity for grace.

Humor reminds us that since Jesus became human, even the tedium of our daily tasks is blessed, and our attitude toward the world and ourselves must remain open to wonder and possibility. The day-to-day is being redeemed, and our role as believers is to

participate in God's (apparently) slow work. For the Word to have been made flesh means that the foibles and limits of the world have become strangely graced.

## CONTEMPLATION

Our third companion on the journey to enlarging our capacity for grace is contemplation. Irrespective of whether we find God in light or in darkness, in joy or in sorrow, each of us is called to live out the mystery of being bound together in love, with an instinctive and generous need to further the same wholeness in others, and in all humanity.

We arrive at this, not by superior gifts and talents, but by the simplicity and poverty which are essential to keep us traveling in a way that is faithful and sometimes beyond our understanding. To be truly contemplative is not to be less concerned with what goes on in the world, but more interested, more concerned, more compassionate.

Compassion – the power of grace – is the fruit of contemplation and the living sign of Christ's presence among us. As Jesus said, "By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." True contemplation does not isolate but rather binds us together in that love which Jesus came to embody. And conversely, true love and compassion bring us to a greater appreciation of the necessity of contemplation in our lives.

When we are contemplative, we are more capable of deeper concern for others, more attentive to all that is fully human but truly spiritual, even divine. As St. Paul said in Philippians, "If there is any excellence in anything, anything good, beautiful or true, think about these things and the God of peace will be with you."

Carmelite William McNamara once observed that "You can study things, but unless you enter into ... intuitive communion with them you can only know about them, you

don't know them. To take a long loving look at something – a child, a glass of wine, a beautiful meal – this is a natural act of contemplation, of loving admiration."

This intuitive communion, this loving admiration is the fullest expression of power that is shared, power that sees immense possibilities; we develop and deepen our capacity for grace.

As Pope Francis has said, this "call of Jesus which pushes each of us never to stop at the surface of things," can be realized through "focusing on the heart to see of how much generosity everyone is capable."

At the close of Pope Francis' homily announcing the Jubilee Year of Mercy he said "This time is sacred opportunity for I am convinced that the whole Church will find in this Jubilee the joy needed to rediscover and make fruitful the mercy of God, with which all of us are called to give consolation to every man and woman of our time." Francis invites us to acknowledge and deepen our capacity for grace "so that all focus on the heart to see of how much generosity everyone is capable."

As we begin this Jubilee year, we are accompanied by a mighty host of witnesses – some we know, some we do not know, and some we have just met – Felecia Sanders and Nadine Collier for example. In their company we refresh ourselves, experiencing the hospitality that they have laid out for us, a way of life shaped by the kind of guests they welcomed.

At the close of his proclamation of the Jubilee, Pope Francis identifies a most powerful witness to the capacity for grace and guide and encourage us: "From this moment on," he said, "we entrust this Holy Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she might turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey."

Kathleen Norris in her essay "Open Path" invites us to imitate Mary's response to the angel in the Annunciation story:

God has put us together on the road to Jerusalem. It is never the right time, and we are never ready. We have other, more important things to do and places to be. The burden is too great for us to carry. But once we say, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord,' the angel will depart, and the path will open before us. We can trust that even in this violent, unjust and despairing world, God's word of hope is true, and we will sing it 'from generation to generation.'

May we – like Mary and with Mary – discover and deepen our capacity to be full of grace, full of the power of God's compassion and mercy.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Sr. Gilmary's article spoke about developing and deepening our capacity for grace and compassion by means of hospitality, humor and contemplation. Can I recall specific examples of being changed and stretched through acts of hospitality, humor or times of contemplation? Do I see these three attitudes interacting in our parish/congregational meetings and processes?

Effective leaders know how to inspire and motivate others to join them in a shared vision or undertaking. How could I further develop my skill-set and commitment to such an approach to leadership? Do I know how to tap the hidden reservoir of power within others?

Ultimately, great leaders not only do grand gestures but their whole life becomes a "sign," a message, a parable. Do I see traces of that process happening in me?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sister Gilmary Rowe has been a member of the Regional Community of Detroit leadership team since 1998 and was elected President in August 2005. She holds a bachelor's degree in business from Mercy College of Detroit and a Master of Divinity degree from Yale University. Sr. Gilmary lived and ministered with poor persons in Argentina for four years and taught at high schools there and throughout Michigan for nearly ten years. She was adjunct faculty at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, MI, and assistant professor at Mercy College of Detroit, University of Detroit Mercy, and Mercy College of Northwest Ohio. Sr. Gilmary developed the women's program at Mercy Education Project in Detroit and served as its coordinator. She serves on the board of Our Lady of Guadalupe Middle School for Girls, chairs the first Detroit Non-Profit Housing Corporation (McAnley Commons) and is liaison for the West Midwest Justice Committee.



## VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

This bronze sculpture known as “Homeless Jesus” by Canadian sculptor Tim Schmalz, was dedicated in late June in front of Ss. Peter and Paul Jesuit Church, Detroit.


On that occasion, Leonard Johnson, a regular patron of the parish warming center looked at the statue and blurted out, “That’s me!”



## ABOUT THE ARTIST

For over 30 years, Timothy has been sculpting large scale monuments for the Catholic Church. Working in bronze, Timothy is a figurative artist; his pieces are installed worldwide. One of his most famous pieces, entitled "Whatever You Do", sits outside Santo Spirito Hospital, the oldest hospital in Rome, near the Vatican. Timothy describes his sculptures as visual translations of the Gospels. Timothy also creates large public pieces in bronze. Some of these include monuments that honor veterans and firefighters. Creating epic pieces that connect with viewers through design and details, not only touching the viewer on an emotional level but also allowing them to feel somewhat a "part" of the piece is what Timothy strives to achieve with his sculpture.

Visit [sculpturebytp.com](http://sculpturebytp.com) to view more of Timothy's work and to purchase prints.



# THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS

By Father Richard Hart



## CAN THE POWERLESS STILL HAVE POWER?

"I've had it! I can't take it anymore!" These and similar expressions often well up within most of us from time to time as we feel powerless before an illness or because of tensions in relationships or the workplace. Sometimes whole nations rise up in angry protest precisely because of their experience of repressed power. All the world - at some level - seems to face struggles of power. Within ourselves are the deepest and most profound "power struggles". Can I find a depth of spiritual power in the midst of circumstances I cannot control? Do I believe, for example, that the story of the Widow's Mite is being played out in my life - namely that my "two cents" really matter to God and to others? Does the non-violent protest of a powerless person like Ghandi or Martin Luther King still offer in our power-hungry, media-driven world - compelling meaning and challenge and hope?

What can I do to counteract powerlessness? First of all, perhaps we need to recognize that powerlessness is often a question of perspective and perception. Admittedly there are many circumstances that we cannot control but even in the worst of situations, we have the power of imagination. The great risk in our society is quite often that we throw ourselves into a whirlwind of activity, preoccupied with many plans and projects and then end up becoming only more discouraged and feeling powerless. It is easy enough to take a "Peter Pan" flight from the real world and withdraw into despair or nurse bitterness. How do we take the step forward to discover some type of power and meaning, hope and purpose in the middle of confusion? First we need to admit our anger and frustration with the situation in which we find ourselves. Then we can begin to look for hidden resources, potential and possibilities. It takes slow, steady steps to become who we wish to be. It will mean pain and struggle. Perhaps it will also mean partnership and working with others.

The way forward in our inward journey is by accepting the reality of failures and setbacks and not trying to avoid them. Some psychologists speak of what they call a “Jonah” complex which means trying to protect ourselves from the possibility of failure. This imitation of Jonah – running away from our vocation – is often masked as powerlessness. The real challenge is to “stay the course” and not run away from the struggle. Only with “staying power” do we discover that we are indeed very powerful people!

Is this not the story of Jesus Christ? Did He not accept powerlessness in the earthly sense of power so as to manifest our potential for another kind of power – something spiritual? Was this not the story of St. Paul’s conversion from a false power, the power of control and self-perfection to the admission of his own powerlessness before the Law?

#### A GOAL DRIVEN LIFE

Once we admit our limitations we can begin to look for ways to compensate or complement our physical, emotional or spiritual difficulties. We begin to sort things out. In this process of discernment, we begin to form a plan and set steps to achieve it. Pastor Rick Warren in the Purpose Driven Life insists we need to start with God, viewing our lives as temporary, a dress rehearsal for eternal life. Rather than letting our lives be defined by the dominant, worldly or cultural values and standards, we choose otherwise. If we are always trying to fit in with the apparently successful or powerful people, we doom ourselves to endless stress and frustration if not depression and meaninglessness. Meaning and hope are born out of a conviction that I am deeply loved by God

and am here for a specific reason and purpose. No matter what, I have the power to decide how I will handle a situation.

Jesus himself clearly demonstrates a new kind of power precisely by the rejection of worldly standards of power. We see this in the Scene of the Temptations as given by Matthew and Luke in which He refuses to do something relevant for the sake of instant popularity and recognition (changing stones into bread or jumping down from the top of the temple). He deliberately “emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming a human likeness, obedient even unto death...” By His Word and above all by His example, Jesus shows that He was going to accomplish His purpose not by the normal means of “power” but by way of weakness. He fulfilled His mission by going through the process of suffering, death and waiting for resurrection. At no time did He seek to use manipulative or exploitative power over anyone else. While He had power over sickness, illness, demons, the waves of the sea and even death, He did not invoke that power for His own comfort or to shield Himself from the struggles of life.

Power, when properly used, can help us reach unimaginable heights. Consider 52 year old Martin Strel who had a dream and a goal to swim 3272 miles, an exhausting, sunburnt delirious, journey down the Amazon River. The distance amounted to a drive from Miami to Seattle. His goal: to set a new world record for long-distance swimming. He did it! He made the impossible possible. The day before Mahatma Ghandi was killed, a reporter inquired of him what was the best advice he would offer anyone? Ghandi said that we should have nothing to do with power. Even though he was not explicitly a Christian, he

*SUFFERING CEASES TO BE SUFFERING AT THE  
MOMENT ONE FINDS MEANING .  
(VICTOR FRANKL)*

certainly was following the wisdom of Jesus to renounce power and by choosing to identify with the powerless.

## FACELESS PEOPLE

In the Beatitudes, Jesus was giving a summary of His own blueprint for happiness and peace. All the situations mentioned in the Beatitudes describe people in a state of powerlessness. In these autobiographical blessings, Jesus was inviting His disciples of every time and place to live in solidarity with Him by choosing to be poor in spirit, by staying with those who mourn and who are the meek and humble of the Earth. We can find happiness and a new power precisely by admitting our hunger and thirst for something more than what we already have, by refusing to let ourselves be caught up in the addictive tendency to fill our appetites. In choosing to remain “empty” we express a new kind of power – self-control – but even more, a deep trust in the Lord who has promised to satisfy us with something more than bread alone.

To choose to be with the apparently powerless already a powerful act for it is indeed counter cultural! Is this not what Mother Theresa modeled for us? Is this not what Pope Francis tries to demonstrate? Who of us have not felt awkward and uncomfortable being with persons who have special needs mentally or physically? While it is not easy or comfortable, our willingness to remain their side helps all parties to discover a new sense of peace, strength and courage. Such is the power of compassion that is born out of mutual vulnerability.

## THE MYSTERY OF SUFFERING

When we face physical or emotional suffering or share the suffering of a loved one, quite often we experience a great sense of powerlessness and frustration. We keep asking, “Why me?” “Why is God allowing this to happen to this good person who already has so much suffering?” There is nothing wrong with asking such questions as long as we can live without demanding or imposing a ready answer. Waiting with the question and even befriending the question makes the difference. When visiting the Philippines, Pope Francis was

asked by a 12 year old girl why God lets innocent children suffer. At first, the Pope was speechless and shaken but then said there is no easy answer and we can see things only when our eyes are cleansed by tears.

Victor Frankl, in light of his experience in the concentration camp during the Holocaust, wrote that suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment that one finds meaning. Jesus gave meaning to the suffering He endured precisely because He embraced it with love. Blessed Theresa of Calcutta maintained that suffering in itself has no value unless it is seen in relation to the passion of Jesus. Suffering embraced with love can become a beautiful gift.



The only genuine way to get through suffering is through embracing and accepting the suffering. Consider the classic example of Jesus to Nicodemus: lifting up the serpent. Face head on



the very thing that brings pain. Blessed Theresa of Calcutta herself suffered terrible spiritual darkness for more than half a century but desired to be “an apostle of joy,” and was able to remain cheerful despite the personal darkness. She later admitted that she felt like she had been in Hell and her greatest fear was that she might become a Judas. But she remained joyful and insisted that her sisters always remain joyful as well.

### PATIENCE IS THE KEY

Think about a time that you felt powerless. Perhaps you were trapped in a traffic jam and there was absolutely nowhere to go. Maybe it was a medical report about cancer or a life-threatening disease. Perhaps it was a collapse of personal finances, the breakdown of a relationship that had been an anchor in your life, the loss of job or reputation. In those cases, so often the only recourse is patient endurance. By patience here we do not mean just enduring an event with white-knuckled determination, often harboring

resentment at the same time. Nor is it indifference, stoic passivity. Rather, patience means accepting the situation as a gift, waiting hopefully for the process to run its course. In the struggle to be still, to wait and to trust, we begin to realize we are not alone. We realize that we are becoming patient with God, that is, patient with God and what God allows just as God has always been patient with us.

Impatience means we have lost our power of control and in the scramble to deny our powerlessness, we can become insensitive and over-bearing, cutting people off in mid-sentence, snapping at requests or questions.

The best way to handle a situation when we are not in control is to resolve ahead of time to be accepting and enjoy the change of plans and schedule.

Sometimes it helps to remember that God is more patient with us and our sense of powerlessness than we are with ourselves. God indeed is the source of all patience! He keeps watching for us as the Prodigal Parent waiting for the child to return. The famous psychologist Karl Rogers related the story that at the age of 40 he mysteriously became impotent. During this time, his wife remained faithful to him, loving and supportive. At the end of the year, his impotency disappeared. He explained that his wife’s patience and fidelity touched him so deeply he knew he would love her until death would separate them.

### HOPE

Sister Joan Chittister once wrote that “the truth is that none of us is really powerless. Power resides in the willingness to stand alone until the whole world is forced, just by reason of our un-remitting, implacable, stubborn committed presence to recognize that there is more to the present question than the answer we have been given and not explored.” Maybe what we need to ask, therefore, is the following: Are we willing to change?

If we struggle with powerlessness, perhaps we need to turn to Christ’s own Death-Resurrection. Dying on the cross and descending into Hell, Christ embodied a hope that was very real. He screamed out loud His sense of abandonment but the very fact that He was articulating the words of Psalm

22 already revealed a certain sense of confidence that He would be heard and that He was precious to His Father. Note the beauty of the repeated expression "my God, my God..." Hope is not just a longing for something foreseeable but the courage to abandon myself into the mystery of God.

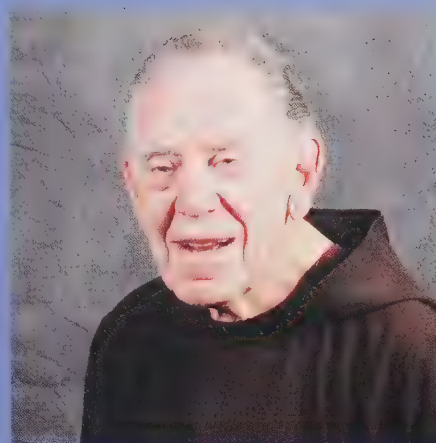
We attain meaning and purpose as we are willing to commit ourselves to something greater and larger than ourselves. Hope in the resurrection is the ultimate "power of the powerless." It takes us beyond the present to a future dream for all. But the path to that gift requires conversion, change and accepting what we cannot change. It is not just a fairy tale ending or a dramatic reversal for which we long but it is simply the indescribable peace and confidence which come when we accept the fact we are totally loved as we are. Every one of us has power inasmuch as we are capable of giving and receiving love.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Is my understanding of power profound enough that I truly believe that everyone has some form of power? How do I encourage those who feel powerless?

How do I deal with the times and settings where I feel "powerless" (illness, loss, limitations in my ministry etc.)?

In situations of apparent weakness have I been able to "connect" in a more fully human way with others experiencing similar struggles?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Hart OFM Cap is a Franciscan, Capuchin, a member of the St. Joseph Province in Detroit. After ordination he was assigned to teaching in the major seminary and was engaged in formation ministry for ten years. He acted as rector of the Capuchin seminary of St. Mary in Crown Point, Indiana for six years. He also taught religious education courses for the laity in the Gary Diocese, and coordinated a number of annual diocesan wide religious education workshops in the Diocese.

He was appointed coordinator of the Capuchin Preachers for the St. Joseph Province, and lives in Milwaukee, WI. He has traveled extensively in the United States and abroad conducting parish renewals, workshops, preached and directed retreats for a variety of religious communities. Hart has also written several books, *How Christian Are You?*, *Powerlessness: Passion for the Possible*, *Passion in Action*, *Edging God Out*, *The Price of Being a Christian* and his latest book *Life's Struggles*.



# OUR GREATEST BLUNDER

By Father Gerry O'Neill





## OUR VISION DETERMINES EVERYTHING

In his book, *Anam Cara*, John O'Donohue makes an amazing claim: "The way we look at things is the most powerful force in shaping our lives." The priest standing on the altar sees a congregation of mostly women and sees the problems of the Church in terms of his reality – where are all the men? Women sitting in the congregation look up at the altar and see mostly men and see the problems of the Church in terms of their reality – where are all the women? Where you stand determines what you see and what you see determines how you act.

Margaret Wheatley, a contemporary writer on the emerging practice of leadership, sees the world through the lens of the new sciences, particularly quantum mechanics. What she sees is summed up in an insightful observation: "We were once made to feel secure by things visible, by structures we could see. Now is the time to embrace the invisible."

In this article I wish to explore what Wheatley's observation means for our engagement with the world, for the pursuit of the spiritual life and for the Church itself.



## THE SUBTLE BUT POWERFUL LIMITATIONS OF THE CLASSICAL WORLD-VIEW

In the classical world-view represented by Newtonian physics, material reality is king. Creation is a gigantic bundle of stuff and the law of cause and effect are reliable. Indeed the secrets of the world may be unlocked by the rigours of science and the resources of the world exploited to provide resources for the enjoyment and benefit of human beings. It is a world-view where the relationship between the human and the rest of creation is at best instrumental and at worst exploitative. Francis Bacon sums it up beautifully: We must keep torturing nature, 'til she reveals her last secrets to us. It is, indeed, a world-view which finds echo in Protagoras' famous dictum – Man is the measure of all things.

Seeing the world in mechanistic terms has other consequences. The giant clock of the universe is predictable; it is made up of its component parts which function in tandem; it provides, if not certainty, at least a high degree of predictability; and it is subject to the second law of thermodynamics – it is running down inexorably towards its own demise.

In this paradigm the relationship between the human and creation is instrumental. The Earth and its resources are valued insofar that they supply the wherewithal for meeting human needs and wants. It is a mechanistic not an organic relationship. The natural world is emptied of inherent value. It is enabling but not enchanted. It is, ultimately, an exploitative and pessimistic orientation towards the world.

The classical world-view places primacy and a great deal of confidence in the human. The capacity of the human is complete and the place of mystery is diminished. As Madonna sings, "We live in a material world and I am a material girl." If this is so, reality can be reduced to its smallest component parts, its basic building blocks, unlocking the secrets of creation. In this scenario, the God of the gaps is effectively deprived of oxygen and space. Creation may be reduced to an elegant equation that whispers, "We are no longer little less than gods."

## REALIZING THE LIMITS OF THE CLASSICIST VIEW

Challenging a current paradigm is risky. Copernicus was convinced from his observations that the sun not the Earth lay at the centre of the universe. However, the power of the existing paradigm silenced and censored Copernicus. The Church refused to embrace a truth that seemed to call into question the centrality of the human in God's plan.

What Copernicus had theorised was an advance on current thinking, not the absolute truth – the sun lies at the centre of the solar system and the earth revolves around it. The truth is often hard to accept or, as Carter Heyward puts it: we can truly know only that which we are not afraid to love, and we can truly love only that which we are not afraid to see.

Heyward's observation can be even more clearly seen in the experience of another eminent scientist, Albert Einstein. On November 22, 1914, he produced the equation that explains his general theory of relativity. He discerned a truth about the universe that usurped then prevalent thinking. The mathematical cosmologist, Brian Swimme, articulates powerfully the impact of Einstein's

# WE ARE ALWAYS A RACE WITH THE LATEST GADGET AND THE LATEST GADGET ALWAYS WINS.

discovery: Through these symbols the universe whispered that it was expanding in all directions. The conventional wisdom of the age was found wanting. However, Einstein lost his nerve. The power of the old paradigm asserted its hold and he added a mathematical term called the cosmological constant to hide the inconvenient truth of an unfolding universe.

Some years later, a Russian mathematical cosmologist, Alexander Friedmann, discovered the awesome truth of an expanding universe when he noticed the plant in Einstein's equation. Even Friedmann's willingness to embrace what Einstein had initially discovered did not convince him to accept this new understanding about the universe. It was only years later that Einstein admitted to his greatest blunder when he saw with his own eyes the universe expanding away from himself. This experience helped him understand that every major breakthrough is a break out of the limits imposed by current thinking.

## OPENING OUR EYES TO NEW VISTAS

What is found at the quantum level is hard to accept. Like doubting Thomas and Albert Einstein we often need to see with our own eyes before we believe. The invisible world challenges many of the assumptions of the visible world. The simplicity of cause and effect breaks down. Things appear to happen for no discernible cause. Predictability gives way to uncertainty. The closest we get to objectivity is to accept the limits imposed by subjectivity. The reality of separation at the macro level appears at the granular to be founded upon networks of relationship and interconnectedness. Claims of mastery based upon scientific reductionism evaporate in the unfolding novelty,

beauty, mystery, complexity and depth found at the quantum level.

Things appear to break down; old certainties no longer hold. However, the other side of fear is excitement. The deeper we enter the quantum space, the more we appreciate the depth of mystery in which we are immersed. New horizons appear and potential arises.

## BEYOND "STUFF"

The foundational reality in the classical world-view is material stuff. It is little wonder that in a story of stuff great energy and determination is given over to the acquisition of more and more stuff. If this world view were intelligent, it would be reasonable



to expect that the acquisition of stuff would satisfy our deepest human longings. In this world view a million dollars in the bank makes life wonderful but a billion makes it heavenly. However, experience teaches us that there is a longing in the human heart that cannot be satisfied with stuff.

Sadly, this craving for material well-being has been ruthlessly exploited by a modern culture where consumerism is the global religion; materialism its high priest; and shopping its chief form of worship. One has only to witness the hysteria evoked by the opening of a new Apple store to see that consumerism has hijacked the religious impulse and used it to sell product. Talk of retail therapy and shop till you drop is humour at its darkest. To paraphrase a line spoken by Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*: "We are always in a race with the latest gadget, and the latest gadget always wins." There is great pathos in the final scene when Willy's wife, Linda, utters these words as she stands before his newly dug grave. "Willy, I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home."

### ENGAGING THE COSMOS AND ITS MYSTERIES

On the other hand, the foundational reality in the quantum world is relationality. We are not born into an alien world that is inexorably running down but out of a creative universe that is expanding at an ever-increasing rate. The great spiritual question is not one of escape from a hostile world but how do we engage with the spectacular unfolding of life itself? In this space we can engage with God's most primal revelation – the story of the Cosmos and our place within it. It is an optimistic orientation towards the world that invites participation and seeds hope.

Scientists now speak of empty space as the quantum vacuum and more poetically, as fecund nothingness. What was a deficit in the old paradigm is now seen as the space where potentiality lies. What appears at the visible level to be nothing is pregnant with possibility. Paul Kelly, an indigenous Australian artist, sings that from little things big things grow. It now appears from quantum mechanics that from the quantum vacuum material arises in a paschal pattern of creation and destruction. As we embrace reality

at the invisible or quantum level, it is part of the human challenge to bring potential realities to life in ways that serve the human, the animal and what we currently term the inanimate world.

Moreover, with our growing understanding of the emerging paradigm we are set free to co-create with the divine. Popular culture has begun to explore the possibilities of the quantum world in films like *Avatar* (2009) and *What the Blip* (2008). Much earlier a film entitled, *Sliding Doors*, hinted that the decisions we make bring a certain reality to life while, at the same time, killing off other potential realities. The act of stepping on to a train leads to a particular life and story whereas missing that train leads to a very different story. The word "decide" points to this elusive truth. Its ending "cide" refers to death – homicide, suicide, infanticide, genocide – The central Christian image of the cross and the paschal mystery both speak of this relationship between life and death.



## MOVING BEYOND THE VISIBLE AND THE FAMILIAR

As Margaret Wheatley suggests, one way to embrace what scientists are teaching us about reality is to value the invisible as much as the visible. In a very real way the mystics of the great world religions did just this. Time and time again the mystics have spoken of reality in terms of unity, interconnectedness, peace, love and compassion. We too may experience this truth if we break the hypnotic hold of things and learn to punctuate busyness with times of stillness. The scriptural injunction – Be still and know that I am God – invites us to experience and honour the depth and profound beauty that lies at the heart of the human and at the core of creation.

Another way to honour this emerging world-view is to re-read Scripture to see truths that were

always there but, until now, we could not see. For example, the two creation stories in Genesis can be read from the perspective of relationality rather than hierarchy. The appearance of the human on the sixth day of creation is not necessarily a sign of superiority based upon a notion of ascending priority. Rather, it could just as well be interpreted as a greater imposition of responsibility for the stewardship of creation that preceded the human dimension. It is no accident that creation was already judged as good before the emergence of Adam. In this reading of scripture, the valuing of the world and its resources for their instrumentality makes no sense.

We are called to pursue an intelligent faith. Anything less would not be worthy of ourselves or of the God of life. The cross and human experience attest to the veracity of what science is telling us. Life and death are intimately connected





in a paschal pattern that puts an old name on the new realities that are emerging from the quantum world.

Almost forty years ago Karl Rahner predicted that the Church of the future would be a mystical church or it would not exist. The old forms and practices of the Church are much loved and have served well countless generations of the faithful.

The question is: Can they now help the faithful to appreciate and enter into the mystery of the divine that is present in the great unfolding story of the cosmos?

To ignore this question may be our greatest blunder!

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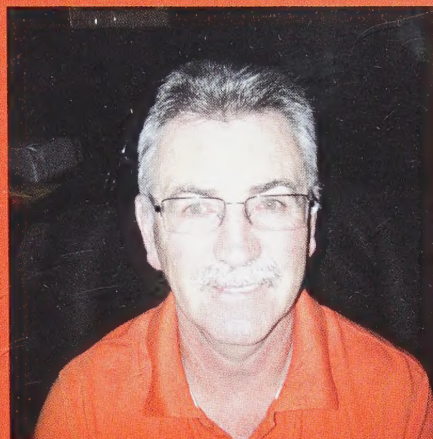
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## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Father Gerry O'Neill challenges us to check our vision: are we willing to try to see everything about ourselves and the universe from a whole different perspective? Where are my "blind spots?" What about my community?

By my own example, how might I challenge my parishioners or co-workers to move beyond the seductive natural attraction to "stuff" – be it acquiring possessions or titles?

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* reminds us that every aspect of the universe is linked or connected to everything else: whether we see it or not, we as humans are already necessarily and unavoidably connected to the realm of nature. There is no room for arrogant human domination or destruction of our natural resources. In my prayer and life-style do I see that worship of God and use of earthly resources go hand-in-hand?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gerry O'Neill holds Masters Degree in both Education and Theology.

In recent years he has served as Director of Mission for St John of God Health Care in Western Australia and currently holds the position of Regional Formation Manager for the Sisters of St John of God Ministries.

He has been key-note speaker at a number of conferences, published work in the Enneagram, Leadership and Visioning.

Currently, he is offering a range of formation workshops that are designed to support those who are charged with the responsibility of continuing the healing mission of Jesus Christ in education, health, welfare and outreach to those on the margins of society.

If you would like to learn more about the author, please visit his web page at [formationmatters.com.au](http://formationmatters.com.au)

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## **Guest House Walking with the Wounded**

Scripps Mansion  
Lake Orion, MI  
October 7-9, 2015

## **Guest House Alumni Fall Seminar**

Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center  
Metairie, LA  
October 5-8, 2015

## **Guest House 57th Annual Bishop's Dinner**

Somerset Inn  
Troy, MI  
October 15, 2015

## **Guest House All Soul's Mass and Luncheon**

Scripps Mansion  
Lake Orion, MI  
November 2, 2015

## **Guest House Advent Evening of Reflection**

Scripps Mansion  
Lake Orion, MI  
December 3, 2015

## **Guest House Alumni Winter Seminar**

DiamondHead Resort  
Fort Myers Beach, FL  
January 11-14, 2016

## **Guest House Alumni Winter Retreat**

DiamondHead Resort  
Fort Myers Beach, FL  
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## **Guest House Summer Leadership Conference**

Chicago Marriott Naperville Hotel  
Naperville, IL  
July 11-13, 2016

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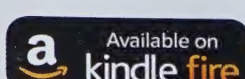


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